

critical digest

VOL. IV No. 8

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The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

New York Openings This Week

The Fourposter-Barrymore, 10/24/51. Playwrights' Company first production of season features Jessica Tandy and Hume Cronyn in Jan de Hartog's new two character play. Jose Ferrer staged the production, Syrjala has provided the settings, and Lucinda Ballard has designed the costumes.

Digests of Current Plays -- more on Page 3

Buy Me Blue Ribbons-Empire, 10/17/51. Unanimous panning accorded new farce comedy by Sumner Locke Elliott, presented by and featuring Jay Robinson. Daily critics were completely unsympathetic with script, supposedly based on incident of producer's being eased out of recent The Green Bay production. Few kind words were spared on any department. Some did think that director Cyril Ritchard and cast tried hard to save the stock farce. But critics generally agreed that Robinson's own acting talents are nil. Coleman, Mirror, even suggested that Robinson may have penned the script. Times and Tribune critics found show acceptable on its own terms until he entered. Hawkins, World Telegram & Sun, giving cast benefit of the doubt, thought it might be better after several performances. Many wished that Vickie Cummings, Audrey Christie and Enid Markey will appear in a better comedy. Watts, Post, along with several others found the case history aspect of the plot downright embarrassing. The play is remarkable, he noted, because it manages to get worse after a tedious first act.

A Sleep of Prisoners-St.James Church, 10/16/51. Unusual presentation of Christopher Fry's new verse drama performed in the 71st Street Church drew majority of the daily reviewers' approval. Those that recommended the Luther Greene production, played by the original London company, pointed out that it was for a limited audience of theatre fans who would really work for their evening's entertainment. All praised fine direction of Michael MacOwen and acting by Leonard White, Stanley Baker and Hugh Pryse. Only Garland, Journal American, didn't think Donald Harron was up to par. Dissenters who found the verse drama too wordy and obscure included critics of Times, Compass and News. Garland also found it wordy, but thought fine acting made evening worth while. Many noted that actors' voices were too loud for small church. Coleman Mirror, thinks script contains some of Fry's most thoughtful and glorious verse. Hawkins, WT&S, found it tremendously exciting. Kerr, Herald Tribune, rated it as vigorous, dignified theatre presenting an over-intellectualized parable of our time. Eagle and Women's Wear daily critics covered Judy Garland's Palace opening instead. Profits go to religious charities.

Glad Tidings-Lyceum, 10/11/51. Split decision greeted Harold Bromley's production of Edward Mabley's new comedy. Signe Hasso and Melvyn Douglas received top praise from all of the daily critics, while there was a wide difference of opinion on the merits of the script. Supporting cast headed by Haila Stoddard, Rudy Bond and Patricia Benoit also shared adjectives. Atkinson, Times, filed mild "con" classing it as unevenly amusing, not delightful. Chapman, News, admitted it was a nice little "audience" play, not a critic's play. While Hawkins, WT&S, thought Hasso's performance was worth the admission price. Sheaffer, Eagle, noted improvements in script after a long summer circuit tryout. McCord, Herald Tribune, found second act in downright bad taste, while WCBS Bill Leonard didn't think it got rolling into the latter half.

News & Notes

Walter Kerr, Commonweal, named "guest" critic of Herald Tribune for fall season. Dick Williams named managing editor of "Theatre Arts", George Jean Nathan, drama critic. Copyright 1951 by T.M.Kraus, 505 5th Ave., N.Y. 17 MU2-0326 \$10 Yearly

' Key to NYC Criticism At A Glance '

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|------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. NY Times | 12. Chr. Science Monitor | 23. This Is New York |
| 2. NY Herald Tribune | 13. Journal of Commerce | 24. Commonweal |
| 3. NY News | 14. Morning Telegraph | 25. Cue |
| 4. NY Mirror | 15. Ward Morehouse | 26. Nation |
| 5. NY Compass | 16. George Jean Nathan | 27. New Leader |
| 6. NY Post | 17. Wall Street Journal | 28. New Republic |
| 7. NY Journal American | 18. Women's Wear | 29. Newsweek |
| 8. NY World Tele-Sun | 19. Billboard | 30. New Yorker |
| 9. Brooklyn Eagle | 20. Variety | 31. Park East |
| 10. LI Press | 21. Critical Digest | 32. Saturday Review |
| 11. Newark News | 22. Theatre Arts | 33. Time |

Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them, not if they think they will be hits. "So-So" means the critic did not state directly if he recommends the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening. Unless otherwise noted critics voted "pro."

AFFAIRS OF STATE-9/25/50

- Con: 1-6-9-12-15-16-17-22-23-24-28-29-32.
None: 10-14-21-25-26. So-So: 31.

BAGELS AND YOX-9/12/51

- Con: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-9-10-15-16-19-20-21-25-27-28.
None: 12-13-14-17-18-22-23-24-26-29-30-31-32-33.

BORSCHT CAPADES-9/17/51

- Con: 1-2-5-6-7-8-9-10-11-21-25-27-28-30.
None: 12-14-15-16-17-18-22-23-24-26-29-31-32-33.

CALL ME MADAM-10/12/50

- Con: 19-22-26-28. So-So: 3. None: 10-14-21-23.

DIAMOND LIL'-9/14/51

- All the critics for Mae, per usual, but against her play.

GUYS AND DOLLS-11/24/50

- Con: 26. None: 10-21.

LACE ON HER PETTICOAT-9/4/51

- Con: 1-2-4-6-7-8-9-15-16-17-18-19-20-23-24-25-28-
None: 12-14-22-29-32. 33.

THE KING AND I-3/29/51

- Con: 26. None: 10-21-22-23-24.

THE MOON IS BLUE-3/8/51

- Con: 16-22. None: 10-21-26-32.

MUSIC IN THE AIR-10/8/51

- Con: 5-6-7-8-15-23. None: 12-13-14-16-17-19-20-
21-22-24-25-26-27-28-29-30-31-32-33.

REMAINS TO BE SEEN-10/3/51

- Con: 1-7-16-18-21-30-33. None: 12-13-17-22-24-
26-27-28-31-32.

THE ROSE TATTOO-2/3/51

- Con: 4-6-7-12-16-22-32-33. None: 10-17-21-24-27.

SAINT JOAN-10/4/51

- Con: 2-4-6-15-23. 29-30-31-32-33.

SEVENTEEN-6/22/51

None: 12-13-14-16-17-19-20-21-22-24-25-26-27-28-
- Con: 2-4-7-26-29-30-33. None: 10-21-22-27-28-32.

SOUTH PACIFIC-4/7/49

- Con: 33. None: 9-10-11-21-24-26-27-28.

STALAG 17-5/8/51

- Con: 4-25-26-27-30. None: 10-21-22. So-So: 3.

A TREE GROWS IN BROOKLYN-4/19/51

- Con: 2-7-16-19-26-27-32-33. So-So: 31.
None: 10-15-21-22.

TWO ON THE AISLE-7/19/51

- Con: 2-3-26. None: 10-12-22-27-28-32.

' Drama Desk Luncheon '

Details of ANTA's five play season and the beginnings of the actual "Academy" part of American National Theatre and Academy were given by managing director Robert Whitehead to the season's first "Drama Desk" luncheon. Each production will open on a Wednesday and play for two weeks. Tickets will be sold on a subscription basis. The first play due January 16th is O'Neill's Desire Under the Elms, directed by Harold Clurman. Two new plays, scheduled are The Circus of Dr. Lao by Owen Conger and Nathaniel Benchley and Mrs. Thing by Mary Chase. Shakespeare's Timon of Athens is the fourth production, while Helen Hayes may star in the final show. Whitehead plans to set up a work and study group which will develop into the actual ANTA playing company. Auditions for the group will be held at ANTA every Saturday morning. "Drama Desk" is the theatre reporters and editors monthly luncheon club.

' Green Room Department '

CRITICAL THOUGHTS...What does really happen to all the good seats is a question the various theatrical investigations have never answered, states McCord, Herald Tribune...John Houseman's Harper's article on the critics is, on the whole, fair and sound, reflects Watts, Post...Chapman, News, advises young men seeking steady job in theatre to investigate theatre law career.

DOOM POSSIBLE...Unless the League of New York Theatres realizes the importance of the pending anti-trust suit against the National Football League for refusing to broadcast certain games, the theatre will be eventually doomed, warns Coleman, Mirror. If government wins it could force producers and promoters to televise their wares against their will.

CUE'S FORECAST...By February the annual attack on critics by disgruntled playwrights, will be launched again, predicts Gabriel, Cue. And in March and April, unless they find better things to jabber about, the critics will turn cute and deny all counts.

LONDON STOPOVER...Old Vic's opener, Marlowe's Tamburlaine the Great with Donald Wolfit didn't win praise of Rice, Post, though London critics rated it highly. The Post drama editor doubts if it will be done again for the next 300 years. Though he agreed with Watts, Post, on his recommendations of London's The Little Hut and Waters of the Moon, he didn't like Peter Ustinov's The Love of Four Colonels. Both agree that London provides a stimulating theatre-going experience.

COLUMN TIPS...Several Broadway actors pick up extra money weekly by coaching Washington politicians for TV, says Walker...Olivier's deal with producer Gilbert Miller on the twin Cleopatras provides that if there are any profits the Oliviers will keep them all, and if there are any losses, Miller will pay them all, informs Lyons.

MAIL BOX...Society of Authors' Representative John Runsey writes to Variety editor that unions, rather than movies or television, may kill the theatre by their excessive demands...Darkness At Noon cast member Richard Seff files demand with Variety that action be taken to end Negro segregation practices at Baltimore's Ford Theatre.

' Digests of Current Reviews '

Remains to be Seen-Morocco, 10/3/51. Taking the new Lindsay and Crouse comedy-mystery simply as a light, farcical whodunit, four weekly critics praised the Leland Hayward production starring Janis Paige and Jackie Cooper. Hobe, Variety, didn't think much of it as a play, but classed it as generally entertaining in its own modest basis; Francis, Billboard, raved that it is a fine mixture of robust farce, light comedy and lusty melodrama. Cue critic thought most of it pretty funny and some really satirical. Time man panned it for being machine-made, expressing surprise at author's aims. While Gibbs, New Yorker, found it neither exciting or funny. Cast and direction praised by most.

Saint Joan-Cort, 10/4/51. Five weekly reviewers raved over Theatre Guild's revival of Shaw play, staged by Margaret Webster and starring Uta Hagen. But Time critic, billing play as great but uneven, feared that the cast didn't have enough glow or stature to overcome the mechanical flaws. Francis, Billboard, and Newsweek critic noted the timeliness of script. John Buckmaster shared top honors, though entire cast was called superlative by most. Gibbs, New Yorker, complained that several of minor characters thought they were in a revival of Ben Hur, but otherwise it is a remarkably satisfactory piece.

' Meet the Critic O Tom Dash '

Drama critics should have enough respect for themselves and their craft to ban misquotations from their reviews in the display ads, Tom Dash told "Critical Digest" in an exclusive interview. While many quotes are accurate, some are so misleading that they could be brought before the Federal Trade Commission for fraudulent advertising. Dash firmly believes that action by the N.Y. Drama Critics Circle and Drama Desk could end this malpractice.

The newly appointed "Women's Wear Daily" and "Daily News Record" critic takes a slightly different view of his role as critic than his colleagues do. The critic is a reporter and analyst who tells enough about the production as a good reporter to enable the theatre goer to make up his own mind, Dash explained. The average theatre goer, he believes, doesn't care if there are technical flaws in construction. He wants to know what the plot is about, what the general mood is, and what kind of characters are involved. With this data on hand he can make up his mind if he wants to see a particular play.

Thus it becomes impossible at times for the critic to state his opinion in absolute "pro" and "con" terms. Dash pointed to two recent plays where split decisions were justifiable in explaining the play to the potential ticket buyer. Remains to be Seen and Saint Joan each can be recommended to theatre goers if their limitations are stated. The attitude of trying to get the critics off the fence can't be complied with in such plays. For it is the job of the critic to report the proceedings and then to let the reader decide for himself if he wants to see the show.

Television, as Dash views it, is no actual threat to the theatre. The presentation of plays may make many non-theatre goers stage-conscious. And after they have seen an actual stage show they will realize how inadequate TV is by comparison. The critic also thinks that TV will force the theatre to offer better plays.

On the controversial subject of ANTA, Dash sides with those who bill the first year's program as a worth while try. Fumbling with such a huge program the first year was inevitable. He believes the new managing director Robert Whitehead is wise to aim at presenting only five good productions.

Dash has been working on Fairchild publications since 1919. A graduate of Columbia University, he majored in newspaper work at the School of Journalism. His first job was as rewrite man on labor news on Women's Wear, then he joined the copy desk. Later he became associate editor and head of the copy desk of both Women's Wear and Daily News Record. In 1944 he was named to head the news division of Footwear News, and in 1947 was assigned full time to spot play and moving reviewing when the late, beloved Kelcy Allen first became ill. Dash had been associated 25 years with Allen and conducted his own feature review column in Daily News Record and Retailing Daily for many years.

' Legit Stuff '

All profits of A Sleep of Prisoners will go to religious and educational causes...First Drama Quartette, which is giving one night stand of Don Juan in Hell at Carnegie Hall on October 22, will play a regular four weeks engagement starting November 29...Proceeds from ANTA Tribute to Elsa Maxwell at the Plaza Hotel on October 26 go to the ANTA Fund...Sam Levenson has filed infringement against Bagels and Yox producers...William Katzell, Broadway producer, filed voluntary petition of bankruptcy...Public Relations Committee of League of N.Y. Theatres endorsed Council of Living Theatre plan for out of town subscription campaign...Ralph Lycett, Westport Country Playhouse, will conduct course in subscription promotion...Playhouse Theatre is to be refurbished..."Plays and Players", a new semi-technical journal on stage craft for little theatre fans, published by Schubert Publications, 220 S. Michigan, Chicago, Ill.

